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Oracle of Doom or Oracle of Salvation? A New Interpretation of Animal Metaphors in Isa 31:4-5 in the Light of Rhetorical Analysis

BARTŁOMIEJ SOBIERAJSKI
Major Seminary of The Society of Christ Fathers in Poznań, Poland
ks.b.sobierajski@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000–0003-3007-787X

Abstract: This article seeks to clarify the meaning of animal metaphors contained in Isa 31:4-5. Difficulties in interpreting these metaphors are associated with the Hebrew syntax as well as the proper reading of the symbolism of the characters and animals found within these verses. These issues also raise the question of the message of the whole prophecy: is it an oracle of doom or of salvation? The article provides an overview of previous attempts to explicate the metaphors and proposes a new interpretation of them. It turns out that Isaiah consciously and intentionally uses some ambiguous images and formulas in order to make a specific impression on the addresser. Such literary devices are characteristic of his statements from the last period of his activity (705–701 BC). The new interpretation of animal metaphors presented in this study also results from the structure of the oracle, which has emerged through the use of Hebrew rhetoric methods.

Keywords: Isaiah, Isa 31:4-5, animal metaphors, rhetorical analysis

In the history of interpretation of Isa 31:4-5 a multitude of disparate and conflicting interpretations have been proposed. There is no fundamental agreement concerning the metaphorical meaning of the lion and the young lion in v. 4 or flying birds in v. 5. What is the motif of these two comparisons: do they announce doom or salvation? Or does one of them announce doom while the other – salvation? If so, why are they bound together? Or maybe the prophecy transformed its message during ages. What are their functions hidden between the verses condemning the Israelites' behavior (31:1-3 with the typical lament expression – הוֹי) and the part announcing the defeat of the Assyrian aggressor (vv. 8–9)? These ambiguities are also reflected at the syntactical level of the text. What does the expression from v. 4: יֵרֵד יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת לִצְבֹּא עַל־הַר־צִיּוֹן exactly mean? What are the meanings of the statements that YHWH shall "go down to fight upon Mount Zion" or that he shall "go down to fight against Mount Zion"? One can also find other ambiguities and difficulties in interpretation. In fact, this part of the Isaianic text is a real *crux interpretum* for many exegetes.

The article seeks to resolve at least a part of the aforementioned exegetical problems through an exploration of the real meaning of the metaphors of a growling lion (v. 4) and hovering birds (v. 5), hoping to answer the following questions: What is hidden behind the images of a lion and birds? To whom do the animals refer to? Can one find other hidden subjects, e.g. behind the image of shouting shepherds (v. 4)?

My research is divided into two sections. The first is dedicated to literary issues, placing the prophecy in its own literary and historical context. Then, a structure of the passage pointing out its internal dynamics will be proposed in the light of the rhetorical analysis of the text. In the second part, a new interpretation of the two animal metaphors is advanced. A new understanding of Isaiah images of lion and birds in chap. 31 is supported by remarks concerning the Semitic rhetoric made in the first part of the study.[1]

1. The Prophecy in Its Context

1.1. The Literary Context of Isa 31

Within the section Isa 28–35, one can distinguish smaller parts according to the term הוֹי occurring six times there.[2] It stands as an initial term of six prophecies concerning primarily Jerusalem and her citizens (29:1.15; 30:1; 31:1), but also Samaria (28:1) and Assyria (33:1). Such a scheme allows to treat chap. 28–33 as the sequence of the interwoven oracles of judgment and salvation.[3] A motif that binds them together can be the reign of YHWH (32:1; 33:22): God wants to remove depraved layers of leadership from Jerusalem by using the Assyrian Empire as a tool. However, the exaltation of YHWH discloses his majesty and power both to Israel and other nations

1 This article is based on the conclusions presented as the S.S.L. (Licentiate in Sacred Scripture) thesis: *Oracle of Doom or Oracle of Salvation? An Exegetical Study of Isaiah 31*. The dissertation was written under the supervision of Prof. Alessandro Coniglio and defended on January 30, 2018, at the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem.

2 One can assume that Isa 28–35 is a separate unit because it is the longest poetic text in the section of Isa 28–39. The last part (chap. 36–39), written in prose, is the so-called Historical Supplement, which presents the events of 701 BCE and introduces the message of hope that stays at the beginning of Deutero-Isaiah (chap. 40).

3 As an example, one can show the outline presented by Gary Stansell ("Isaiah: 28–33," 71):
1.הוֹי : 28:1-4 (judgment), 28:5-6 (salvation), 28:7-22 (judgment), 28:23-29 (salvation);
2.הוֹי : 29:1-4 (judgment), 29:5-8 (salvation), 29:9-14 (judgment);
3. הוֹי: 29:15-16 (judgment), 29:17-24 (salvation);
4. הוֹי: 30:1-17 (judgment), 30:18-26 (salvation);
5. הוֹי: 31:1-4 (judgment), 31:5–32:8 (salvation), 32:9-14 (judgment), 32:15-20 (salvation);
6. הוֹי: 33:1 (judgment), 33:2-24 (salvation).

(cf. 28:5-6; 29:6; 30:30). This finally leads to the salvation of Zion, whose model is the miraculous salvation of Jerusalem in 701 BCE (28:16; 29:8; 33:20).[4] Characteristically, certain patterns are repeated in these oracles. First, God opposes and fights against not only the enemies of Israel (e.g. Assyria), but the chosen people as well. Second, God uses other nations – especially Assyria – as tools. The decimation of the Assyrian army in 701, however, is not an expression of YHWH's powerlessness, but rather a manifestation of his direct action, without the usage of any instrument. Third, the miraculous saving of Jerusalem in the eyes of Isaiah is a failure of human intent. These motives appear, among others, in the following oracles.

The first (Isa 29:1-14) refers to Ariel. Although there are many attempts to show the origin of this word, without any doubt, it designates Jerusalem.[5] The characteristic motif of this passage is the proceeding of YHWH in the fight against Jerusalem, suggesting an instrumental reading of Assyria's role and her attempt to conquer the capital. The repeated preposition עַל (וְחָנִיתִי כַדּוּר עָלָיִךְ וְצַרְתִּי עָלַיִךְ מֻצָּב וַהֲקִימֹתִי עָלַיִךְ מְצֻרֹת – "and I will encamp against you round about; I will besiege against you with towers and raise siegeworks against you," in 29:3) indicates the military reality of capturing the city. Apart from that, it points out that the opponents of God are not only the nations, waging war with Judah, but also the chosen nation itself (cf. also יֵרֵד יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת לִצְבֹּא עַל־הַר־צִיּוֹן וְעַל־גִּבְעָתָהּ in 31:4 and the similar expression in 29:8 – כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם הַצֹּבְאִים עַל־הַר צִיּוֹן).[6] Another characteristic motif is the juxtaposition of Assyria and Ariel as opponents of YHWH. For both of them, their victory is ultimately compared to an illusory dream (in v. 7 for Ariel, in v. 8 for Assyria). The miraculous salvation of Jerusalem does not make it boast and joy, but denounces false human wisdom (vv. 9–12; cf. the term חָכָם in 29:14 and 31:2), which becomes its humiliation (v. 4).

The second oracle הוֹי (29:15-24) is addressed to הַמַּעֲמִיקִים מֵיהוָה – "deeply hiding themselves from YHWH" (cf. the call שׁוּבוּ לַאֲשֶׁר הֶעְמִיקוּ סָרָה in 31:6), who are identified as those whose "actions are covered with darkness" (v. 15). Taking into account the context of the section of chap. 28–39, the allusion to the secretly anti-Assyr-

4 Cf. Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, 205–206; Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 357.

5 Even the occurrence of this word in various consonantal variants (אראל, אריאל, אראיל, הראל) leads to the conclusion that it is likely to be borrowed from another language and adapted to the Israelite consciousness, oftentimes in different ways. The name "Ariel" may have connotations with the word "lion," which would indicate an honorable heroic title (cf. 2 Sam 23:20; Godbey, "Ariel, or David-Cultus," 262). In the Book of Ezekiel, it probably denominates the central part of the altar (firebox), on which the sacrifice, the so-called "God's hearth," was offered (cf. Feigin, "The Meaning of Ariel," 132; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, 426). The Akkadian word *arallū* stands for the land of the dead (cf. Albright, "The Babylonian Temple-Tower," 138; Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 72). On the basis of the Mesha Stele, some exegetes advocate understanding as figurines, statues of divinities (cf. Feigin, "The Meaning of Ariel," 134). On the other hand, based on the Qumran lessons, a connection with the original name of Jerusalem began to be found (cf. Youngblood, "Ariel, «City of God»," 458–460).

6 Cf. Sobierajski, *Antropologiczny wymiar proroctw*, 232–233, 244.

ian negotiations during the Sennacherib's sitting on the throne (705 BCE) can be seen. "Actions covered with darkness" may have an ambiguous meaning. On the one hand, the direct confrontation with Assyria could have been doomed to failure at the outset, hence the search for coalition partners had to involve secret negotiations carried out by the kingdom of Judah.[7] On the other hand, it may also be an allusion to the hindering advice from YHWH, but acting only according to one's own plan (cf. vv. 16.18.24). However, there is no doubt that the addressees are the elites of the capital (if not in political matters, certainly in everyday life, especially in judiciary – cf. 29:21). What is characteristic is that their identity is defined as שֹׁקְדֵי אָוֶן – "ready to evil" (29:20, cf. פֹּעֲלֵי אָוֶן – "those who do evil" in 31:2).

The preceding immediate context of the analyzed passage is the הוֹי oracle in chap. 30, which in many places looks very similar to chap. 31. The parallel can be seen at the very beginning of the two woe-oracles, which are directed to those who seek refuge in Egypt. The essence of the offense is self-reliance as well as not seeking the advice in YHWH (30:1.2.9; cf. 31:1). The announced ineffectiveness of Egypt's help (root עזר in 30:5.7; cf. 31:3) and the voidness of her protection (31:3) have their contraposition in an appeal to put confidence (בִּטְחָה in 30:15; cf. 31:1) in God. The second parallel can be found in the description of future prosperity (30:19-26), which foreshows both, proceeding YHWH and affluent life in a favorable environment. The reference to "that day" (31:7, cf. 30:26) is strictly connected with defiling silver-covered idols and gold-plated images and throwing them away (30:22; cf. 31:7). The third powerful parallel refers to Assyria and her collapse. Significantly, the prophet first proclaims the intervention of YHWH by the invasion of the Assyrian army (30:27), but then the situation changes: God no longer recognizes Assyria as his instrument and foretells her destruction (30:31-33).[8] It is mostly depicted by the motif of fire (30:27.30). The end of the whole oracle, which shows the place called Tophet, is significant: "His firepit made both deep and wide, with fire and firewood in abundance, and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of sulfur, setting it afire" (30:33), because brings to mind analogous end in chap. 31 ("Says the Lord who has a fire in Zion and a furnace in Jerusalem" – 31:9). What is important, "the final hostility of YHWH towards the (Assyrian) empire is not an expression of the ineffectiveness of his intentions; he has foreseen it «for a long time» (מֵאֶתְמוּל – 30:33) and the next stage is his independent, direct action."[9] Below I will show that similar patterns are also found in the prophecy of Isa 31.

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7 Cf. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 408.

8 The recognition of the presence of God in the Assyrian army is supported by the analysis of the phrase: הִנֵּה שֵׁם־יְהוָה בָּא מִמֶּרְחָק, especially the noun שֵׁם and the adverb מִמֶּרְחָק appearing here. Cf. Sobierajski, "«The Name of YHWH Comes from Afar» (Isa 30:27)," 431–445.

9 Sobierajski, "«The Name of YHWH Comes from Afar» (Isa 30:27)," 444.

1.2. The Composition

1.2.1. Structure of the Prophecy

The analyzed passage of Isa 31 can be divided into four units: (1) verses 1–3, (2) verses 4–5, (3) verse 6, and (4) verses 7–9.[10]

The rhetorical unity of the first part is testified by the terms "Egypt" and "horses" (מִצְרַיִם and סוּסִים in vv. 1.3) standing as extreme terms, as well as the term "help," both in the substantive (עֶזְרָה in vv. 1.2) and verbal (עָזַר in v. 3[2x]) forms. To those terms one can also add "chariot" (רֶכֶב in v. 1) and "horsemen" (פָּרָשִׁים in v. 1) as belonging to the same semantic field associated with the things in which Israel seeks support. The messenger formula in the beginning of the next part (v. 4) stands also as a formal criterion, appointing the end of the unit preceding it. The foregoing formal criteria are supported by the content ones. Besides the semantic field mentioned above, consisting of names describing the reality of help for Israel, there is also another field that shows the activities of trust: "to lean" (שָׁעַן), "to trust" (בָּטַח), "to regard" (שָׁעָה), "to seek" (דָּרַשׁ; all of them in v. 1) and a third one in some sense opposing the one mentioned above, i.e. describing the breakdown of trust: "to stumble" (כָּשַׁל), "to fall" (נָפַל), "to perish" (כָּלָה; all of them in v. 3).

The second part (vv. 4–5) is well marked by the messenger formula (כֹה אָמַר־יְהוָה in v. 4) serving as a function of the initial term. For the unity testifies, above all, to the form, i.e. two comparisons constructed in the same way (...כְּ ...כֵּן in vv. 4.5), as well as to a semantic field of animals: "lion" (אַרְיֵה in v. 4), "young lion" (כְּפִיר in v. 4) and "birds" (צִפֳּרִים in v. 5).

The third part (v. 6) is distinguished from the rest of the text by its syntactical form: it is a direct appeal (grammatically: imperative) to turn back to God.[11] The unity of this part is confirmed by the predicate in imperative ("turn back" – שׁוּבוּ) and the subject in vocative ("sons of Israel" – בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), which stand at the extremes of the part.[12]

10 The terminology used to designate the rhetorical units (from the smallest one: term – member – segment – piece – part – passage [equivalent of 'pericope'] – sequence – section – book) and the terms designating the rhetorical function of symmetrical elements (initial, final, extreme, median and central terms) follows: Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 374–375.

11 For the vocative as a marker denoting the beginning of a part of the text: van der Lugt, *Cantos and Strophes*, 79.

12 The MT has the 3 pl. הֶעְמִיקוּ, hence some commentators prefer to translate the whole phrase as: "Turn back to him to whom the children of Israel have made a deep betray," treating בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל as the subject of the relative clause (Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39*, 250; Irwin, *Isaiah 28–33*, 115; Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 217; Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 477–478). However, here a vocative fits much better: "Turn back to him whom you have made a deep turning aside, sons of Israel!," (Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 573; Beuken, *Isaiah II*, 190), all the more as the subject of the primary clause does not have to be the same as that of the relative clause. Cf. Joüon – Muraoka, *A Grammar*, § 158n; Isa 54:1; Ezek 26:17; 29:3.

The last fourth part (vv. 7–9) is delimitated by two technical expressions, which operate as formal criteria: “on that day” (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא in v. 7) and “oracle of YHWH” (נְאֻם־יְהוָה in v. 9). From the syntactical view, one can also find similar constructions of relative clauses standing as extreme terms, e.g. a human had the idols that he made for himself (אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ לָכֶם in v. 7), God has the fire and furnace on Mount Zion (אֲשֶׁר־אוּר לוֹ בְּצִיּוֹן וְתַנּוּר לוֹ in v. 9). The unity of this part is supported, as in the first part, by two semantic fields. The first contains things that are related to human safety: “idols of silver” and “idols of gold” (אֱלִילֵי כַסְפּוֹ וֶאֱלִילֵי זְהָבוֹ in v. 7), “sword” (חֶרֶב in v. 8[3x]), “rock” (סֶלַע in v. 9) and “standard” (נֵס in v. 9). The other constitutes the verbs of vanishing: “to throw away” (מָאַס in v. 7), “to fall” (נָפַל in v. 8), “to flee” (נוּס in v. 8), “to pass away” (עָבַר in v. 9) and “to be shattered” (חָתַת in v. 9).

1.2.2. Rhetorical Dynamics of the Text

The four parts, of which the passage in question is composed (vv. 1–3, 4–5, 6, 7–9), form the structure ABA’B’.

The analysis of rhetorical dynamism has to be considered on two complementary and interwoven planes. The first one assumes that the passage is composed of the two oracles: judgment (vv. 1–5) and salvation (vv. 6–9). Both of them, by contrast, represent two alternative situations in Israel. The former shows the current state. The chosen people turns to Egypt for help (v. 1), but it is immediately indicated that this will be unsuccessful (v. 3).[13] YHWH’s intervention is announced as a protest “against house of evildoers” (עַל־בֵּית מְרֵעִים in v. 2). To specify more precisely such an intervention in the second part (vv. 4–5) is introduced, combined by two comparisons. The continuity of thought underlines the similar construction “fight against Mount Zion” (לִצְבֹּא עַל־הַר־צִיּוֹן in v. 4) with the same preposition עַל. In addition, the connectivity of both parts is emphasized by the term “YHWH” (vv. 3.4) standing as a median term. The cause-effect dependency is brought in by the conjunction כִּי,

13 Syntactically, there is a problem with the verbal chain in v. 1: *yiqtol* (יִשָּׁעֵנוּ), followed by *wayyiqtol* (וַיִּבְטְחוּ) and the double negation *wə…lo-qatal* (וְ...לֹא דָרָשׁוּ ,וְלֹא שָׁעוּ). Willem A.M. Beuken claims that the first part “expresses the current situation (‘who go down… and rely’), while v. 1β relates the process which led up to it and is still going on. This past that continues in the present is best translated by the present verb forms (‘who trust… but do not look… or consult’).” Cf. Beuken, *Isaiah II*, 189. Similar situation can be found in v. 2, where nominal clause is followed by a *wayyiqtol* (וַיָּבֵא), the negation *wə…lo-qatal* (וְ...לֹא הֵסִיר) and *wəqatal* (וְקָם). Hans Wildberger suggests that וְקָם should be translated in the past tense just because of the *qatal* verbs preceding it (cf. Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 205–206). Approving Beuken’s proposal one can also notice the fact that non-perfective conjugation (*yiqtol*) signifies, among other things, the iterative past in main clauses (cf. Waltke – O’Connor, *An Introduction*, § 31.1.1.b), whereas the perfective (*qatal*) – “can be correlated with present-time reference as it is understood in English […]. In the persistent (present) perfective, the suffix conjugation represents a single situation that started in the past but continues (persists) into the present” (Waltke – O’Connor, *An Introduction*, § 30.5.1.c). Having this in mind, I propose to translate it as the English present perfect form, with the meaning of v. 1: they are continuously asking Egypt for help because at some moment they decided to trust more in its chariots than in God (“Woe for those who go down to Egypt for help, on horses lean, and have trust in chariot”); analogously v. 2.

which – together with the messenger formula – performs the function of a central term (for vv. 1–5, and then for vv. 6–7 – together with the stereotype formula "on that day"). One also finds an analogy by appealing to the multiplicity of those who had to defend Israel (כִּי־עָצְמוּ מְאֹד in v. 1; cf. יִקָּרֵא עָלָיו מְלֹא רֹעִים in v. 4). The second alternative situation of the Israelites presupposes their conversion, expressed in their return to YHWH (v. 6). Although, the link of this part to the next one (vv. 7–9) is no longer so rhetorically exposed, but there is a clear passage of effect, suggested by the conjunction כִּי.[14] The sign, which indicate the unity of the second oracle (vv. 6–9), might also be the relative clause with אֲשֶׁר (vv. 6.7.9) repeated three times.[15] This dynamics can be schematically presented as follows:

AB (vv. 1–5)	Fate of Israel deviated from YHWH
A'B' (vv. 6–9)	Fate of Israel returned to YHWH

The symmetry of these bi-parts is underlined – from the rhetorical side – above all by the presence of the expressions standing as central terms, that are composed of the conjunction כִּי and stereotype formulas (כִּי כֹה אָמַר־יְהוָה in v. 4 and כִּי בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא in v. 7).[16]

Such an approach must be completed and integrated with the second one, showing parallels between each part. The parallel between A and A' is emphasized by the contrast of Israel's behavior, expressed by the verbs of motion. As before, the Israelites went to Egypt for help and they did not seek God (v. 1), so now Israel is called to return (שׁוּבוּ in v. 6) to YHWH. Moreover, this descent (יָרַד) implies not only the horizontal, but also the vertical distance, which in A' is cast by the verb הֶעְמִיקוּ. On the other hand, on the semantic basis, it is important to notice the opposite of the attitude: the deep "turning aside" (סָרָה) of Israel is contrasted to the word of YHWH, which he "has not turn aside" (לֹא הֵסִיר in v. 2), he does not change. The parallelism also emphasizes the presence, only in these parts, of the name "Israel." Although the syntagms associated with this noun are different (קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל in v. 1, בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל in v. 6), but one can see the bridge formed between the parts. The "sons of Israel" do not recognize their belonging to YHWH – the "Holy of Israel," and they seek strength and help in foreign powers, instead of looking for them in God. Thus, despite the volume difference of part A and part A', they show a clear parallelism. On the other hand, the relationship between B and B' results from their function, which is to show the effects of these particular attitudes of Israel: either rejecting YHWH or returning to him. Formally, the parallelism is primarily emphasized by the final

14 Cf. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 575; Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 406.

15 In v. 4c, there is also the אֲשֶׁר conjunction, but in an adverbial phrase of time (meaning "when").

16 Such a structure is confirmed by the observation made by Marvin A. Sweeney (*Isaiah 1–39*, 407): "It is noteworthy that chap. 31 makes little sense without vv. 6–9. If the passage was designed to condemn alliance with Egypt, it can hardly succeed in that it fails to present an alternative strategy until vv. 6–9. Egyptian alliance is condemned, but the images of destruction in vv. 1–5 hardly provide a full basis for abandoning the position. As vv. 4–5 make clear, Jerusalem is doomed whether Egypt attempts to help or not. Vv. 6–9 provide the basis for positive action."

terms "Jerusalem" and "Zion," which marks the ends of these units. It is true that in part B they do not appear side by side, but, by treating each of the comparisons as the separate pieces, one can see that the terms stand always at their ends (vv. 4.5; the same as in part B', already together at the end of the oracle – v. 9). The term "YHWH" fulfills an analogous function: indicating the end: in part B in the construct chain יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת (vv. 4.5), while in part B' as נְאֻם־יְהוָה (v. 9). From the point of semantics, this parallelism is expressed by the descriptions of the behavior of the lion and of Assyria. While the lion is not afraid about the fullness of shepherds and "by their voice is not shattered and at their noise is not daunted" (מִקּוֹלָם לֹא יֵחָת וּמֵהֲמוֹנָם לֹא יַעֲנֶה in v. 4), Assyria behaves in an opposite way: "he shall flee itself from a blade of sword […] his rock in terror shall pass away, and shall be shattered by the standard his officers" (וְנָס לוֹ מִפְּנֵי־חֶרֶב… וְסַלְעוֹ מִמָּגוֹר יַעֲבוֹר וְחַתּוּ מִנֵּס שָׂרָיו in vv. 8.9). One can see both, the similarity of words (the verb חָתַת in vv. 4.9) and the sentence structure (using the preposition מ). Thus, the diagram of the dynamics of the whole oracle presented above can be supplemented and presented as follows:

A (vv. 1–3) Deviation of Israel
    B (vv. 4–5) God's rise against Israel
A' (v. 6) Call to return
    B' (vv. 7–9) God's rise against Assyria

The understanding of the message of the two comparisons (vv. 4–5) will be, on the one hand, based on their linkage with part A from the causal point of view and, on the other hand, their significance should be read by looking at the parallel part B'. Having outlined the structure of the oracle, one can therefore see the premise that the animal metaphor may combine two elements: punishment for deviation (taking into account its correlation with vv. 1–3) and the character of this punishment (which somehow will be similar to the character of the salvation from vv. 7–9). Therefore, if the salvation will be done by God himself and not according to the human thoughts ("Assyria shall fall by a sword, not of mortals" – v. 8), then we expect to find similar thoughts in the part B of the oracle (vv. 4–5). The following section will show that Isaiah gives such a meaning to these comparisons.

2. A New Proposal of Interpreting the Two Metaphors

2.1. The Metaphor of the Lion

The sentence syntax implies that behind the image of the lion (כְּפִיר ,אַרְיֵה) is YHWH himself (in both parts of the comparison the lion and YHWH are the only ones in sg.). All exegetes accept this interpretation, and it is also consistent with the li-

on's symbolism in the Middle East and on the pages of the Old Testament.[17] "The most powerful among the wild beasts, which does not turn back before any" (Prov 30:30); it is famous for its strength (2 Sam 1:23), courage (2 Sam 17:10) and roaring (Ezek 22:25). Particularly, the latter feature was used to compare YHWH to the lion because of his loud voice aligned just to the lion's roar (the verb שָׁאַג in Job 37:4; Amos 1:2, both also with the noun קוֹל used in Isa 31:4). The Book of Hosea brings a direct comparison of God to the lion (and also to other wild animals: leopard and bear – cf. Hos 13:7-8) in the context of the Syro-Ephraimitic War (the beginning of Isaiah's activity): He will be "as a lion to the house of Judah," who "tears the prey and departs" (Hos 5:14).[18] The latter case is particularly important as some of the exegetes maintain that YHWH could not be represented in the image of the lion tearing apart his prey – Jerusalem.[19] However, if Hosea, contemporary to Isaiah but operating in the Northern Kingdom, illustrates the action of God by the image of the wild beast against Ephraim, one should be open to the same interpretation in Isa 31:4 regarding the Southern Kingdom.

The enemies of Israel were also described as lions. As an example, one should mention Amos 3:12, in which – in an ironical way – the help for Israel is showed: the shepherds are able to rescue from the lion's mouth "only two legs or a piece of an ear." In the context of Isaiah, the invasion of Assyria is compared to "a roaring lion (לָבִיא and כְּפִירִים), which growls, grasps its prey (טֶרֶף, cf. 31:4[20]) and carries it off, and there is no rescue (מַצִּיל, cf. 31:5)" (5:29).[21] The Assyrian rulers during the war expeditions described themselves willingly as lions.[22] The last example (Isa 5:29) is significant, because Assyria is clearly portrayed for Isaiah as a tool in the hands of YHWH (cf. 5:26; 10:5-6.15); however, it rebels against the task assigned by God (10:7). In this light, in the image of the lion from chap. 31 one cannot directly see YHWH, but Assyria, though it remains only the tool in his hand.

There is a discussion whether behind the image of "shepherds" – רֹעִים – some specific people or nation can be seen. The problem with the entire image is that the shepherds are not normally perceived as aggressors against sheep nor is the lion their defender. The verb רָעָה has specific, theological implications in Isaiah. Together with the רָבַץ, it is often used to describe the future condition: either the desolation (5:17; 27:10) or peace provided by the presence of the only one shepherd – YHWH

17 Cf. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39*, 316; Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, 225; Motyer, *Isaiah*, 202; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 427; Childs, *Isaiah*, 232; Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 177; Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 221; Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 479; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 404.

18 A broader discussion of the symbolism and metaphors of animals, especially lions, also with regard to deities, see: Nielsen, "I am Like a Lion to Ephraim," 184–197.

19 Cf. Beuken, *Isaiah II*, 235–236; Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 257–258.

20 The noun טֶרֶף normally describes the prey of wild animals, very often linked with the image of the lion (Gen 49:9; Num 23:24; Deut 33:20; Job 4:11; 38:39; Ps 7:3).

21 The other examples are: Jer 2:14-15; 4:7; 25:38; Nah 2:12; Zech 11:3.

22 Cf. Tawil, "El león y las aves," 161–162.

(14:30), also in the eschatological perspective (11:7).[23] The motif of the appropriate ruler, who could provide peace for Judah, is leading especially in the first part of Proto-Isaiah (chap. 1–12). Such a task does not fit the succeeding kings or the leaders of Jerusalem (cf. 1:10.23; 3:1-4.12-14; 5:8-23; 7:10-12; 9:13-15; 10:1), hence YHWH announces the awakening of the ideal ruler – Emmanuel (chap. 7). The prophecy of Isa 8:23b–9:6 shows his introduction to the throne, and in chap. 11 – description of his reign.[24] What is more, the "shepherd" can also refer to the kings in the ancient Near East.[25] The use of the plural רֹעִים, in chap. 31, may thus be a conscious contrast to the other rulers (whether nations or individuals) with the very one who will reign according to the will of YHWH. In this light, "shepherds" (31:4) can mean both, Jerusalem's leaders, seeking help in Egypt, and Egypt itself, which for Judah seemed to be an effective guarantor of peace.[26] Such understanding is confirmed by v. 3, in which the annihilation of the helper (Egypt) and the helped one (Judah) is equally pronounced.

These "shepherds" are characterized by two nouns describing their voices: קוֹל ("voice") and הָמוֹן ("noise, rumble"). Both of them have the specific usage in Isaiah (besides the use of קוֹל in the situation of speech or cry, e.g. Isa 10:30; 15:4; 24:14; 28:23): they often occur in theophanies (6:4; 29:6; 30:30-31) and similar to them, the descriptions of YHWH's moving into battle (13:4; 33:3), or among the features that describe the opponents of God (17:12; 32:14). As it was mentioned above, the "voice" of God is sometimes compared to the lion's "roar." One has to consider especially the nearest context of chap. 31: in chap. 30 קוֹל is connected very clearly with the manifestation of divine power and the punishment for Assyria (30:30-31, cf. also 29:6). Moreover, the expression מִקּוֹל יְהוָה יֵחַת אַשּׁוּר from 30:30 is very similar to that from 31:4: מִקּוֹלָם לֹא יֵחָת. The voices are opposed one to each other: the one of God "frightens" Assyria, the one of Assyria cannot "frighten" God.[27] Certain irony

23 Cf. Sobierajski, "Mesjański ekosystem (Iz 11,6-8)," 132–133.

24 One can contradict the continuity of these prophecies and their messianic nature in relation to the expectations of the royal descendant. Their connection is primarily due to the common motif of the child and a number of elements belonging to the topos of the king and the monarchy. Texts from chap. 9 and 11 would be both autonomous prophecies and some kind of re-interpretation of the oracle of chap. 7 because Isaiah himself sought to understand the message of Emmanuel. More broadly, both their mutual relationship and the argumentation for their messianic character are discussed in: Pikor, "Pytanie o mesjański sens Izajaszowych proroctw," 15–36.

25 Cf. Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 221.

26 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 574.

27 Both occurrences of the verb חָתַת are in *Ni* can also be found in Isa 7:8; 8:9, and for this reason – for H. Wildberger (*Isaiah 1–12*, 351) – this verb belongs to the typically Isaianic vocabulary. The second verb עָנָה is used here in its basic meaning "to be daunted" (*Qal*, but more often in *Pi*: "to humble, violate, degrade," e.g. Gen 34:2; Exod 22:21; Ps 94:5) and derives from the root ענה (the homographic root both for the meaning עָנָה I: "to answer" and עָנָה II: "to humble"; historically, probably the first one derives from the original ענו and the second from עני, although there is no certainty about it). Cf. Gerstenberger, "עָנָה II," *TDOT* XI, 231.

of the changed roles in theophany can be seen: the divine appears, the people make noise, the divine does not frighten.[28] The second noun הָמוֹן is in Isaiah, in the same nearest context, assigned to this hostile empire as well. Chap. 29 describes Assyria during the siege of Jerusalem in 701 with the words הֲמוֹן זָרָיִךְ ("the murmur of strangers"), הֲמוֹן עָרִיצִים ("the murmur of tyrants") and הֲמוֹן כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם ("the murmur of all the nations") (29:5.7.8). In conclusion, one may find some ambiguity during the analysis of the vocabulary of the shepherds against which the lion appears. On the one hand, the shepherds can refer to the rulers and defenders in the capital, which the Kingdom of Judah expected, also among the other nations. On the other hand, there are clear references to the Assyrian army besieging Jerusalem during the 701 BCE campaign. Isaiah seems to imply just at this point that YHWH – lion – is against both Assyria (and her king), and Jerusalem, specifically her rulers.

Taking into account these two analysis of "shepherds" and "their voice," one can show yet another possible allusion to be seen in this image. Shawn Z. Aster sees in the root עזר (vv. 1.2.3) an Isaianic reference to the person of Azuri, king of Ashdod, who before 712 BCE ceased paying tribute for Assyria and encouraged the nearest kingdoms to form an anti-Assyrian coalition. The rebellion was smothered by Sargon, who conquered Ashdod and its neighboring cities. For sure also Judah was called to join the coalition. On the other hand, the root רע, returning twice (v. 2), invokes the Egyptian commander Re'u, whose superior was Shabaka. He, along with Iaubidi, king of Hamath, and Hanun, king of Gaza, developed a revolt against Assyria in about 722 BCE. In the battle at Rafiah, Sargon defeated the allied troops. These events influenced Judah and the neighboring kingdoms, which remained loyal to the Assyrian Empire at least until 716 BCE.[29] The abovementioned connotation between the root רע and the Egyptian commander Re'u also supports the fact, that his name was found in the inscription from 707 BCE (thirteen years after the battle at Rafiah):

> Hanun, king of Gaza, together with Re'u, the *turtenu* [second-in-command] of Egypt, made battle and war against me at Rafiah. I smashed and defeated them. Re'u feared the noise of my weapons and fled, and his place is not seen

and that his name is written using the shepherd's logogram. Such an image corresponds to the irony of Isa 31:4: it is difficult to imagine that the voice of shepherds could frighten the beast, however, only the sound of Sargon's weapons was sufficient to make Re'u's escape, even without seeing the direct threat.[30]

28 Cf. Eidevall, "Lions and Birds as Literature," 84.
29 Cf. Aster, "Isaiah 31," 351–354.
30 Cf. (also the quotation of the inscription is after:) Aster, "Isaiah 31," 352. There is also another inscription from Khorsabad, in which the sentence is found: "Re'u, like a shepherd whose sheep was stolen, fled alone and went away."

The second part of the comparison presents a major problem: how should we understand יֵרֵד יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת לִצְבֹּא עַל־הַר־צִיּוֹן וְעַל־גִּבְעָתָהּ ? The God will go down “to wage a war on the Mount Zion” or “to wage a war against Mount Zion”? Arguments for the first interpretation are as follows:

1. The ancient translation of the Vulgate: “super montem Zion.” However, one must remember that the preposition “super” do not have the same ambiguity as עַל in Hebrew, so the translator had to choose one of the semantic options leaving the other one.[31]
2. The character of the whole speech. The second comparison speaks about the salvation of Jerusalem (גָּנוֹן וְהִצִּיל פָּסֹחַ וְהִמְלִיט – v. 5), therefore, for some exegetes, it is a clear signal that in the same spirit of salvation one should also read v. 4.[32] However, also at this point we can ask: was v. 5 really the promise of salvation originally? For some exegetes it is for sure an redactional addition, representing the later stage in the development of the oracle: it transforms the preceding image of destruction into the promise of salvation.[33]
3. For the others, the image is not about the lion that pounces on its prey, but that protects its prey: “it will not allow anyone to steal from him what belongs to him”[34]; the same concerns the birds defending the city. However, there is no unanimity: Marvin A. Sweeney claims that “just as the lion protects his prey in order to eat it himself, so YHWH will protect Zion in order to punish it himself by bringing the Assyrians.”[35]

Arguments for understanding עַל as the adversative preposition (“against”) are as follows:

1. The syntax of the sentence, in which – if the author wanted to avoid any ambiguity – it could be enough to change the order of the sentence to יֵרֵד יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת עַל־הַר־צִיּוֹן לִצְבֹּא, so that there would be no doubt in its interpretation; because the verb צָבָא literally means “to wage war, go into the battle” with עַל – “against” somebody (cf. Num 31:7; Zech 14:12).[36]
2. In the so-called “second beginning” of the Book of Isaiah (2:1), there is a passage (2:6-22) that seems to be a programmatic word for the whole Proto-Isaiah. The ten times repeated announcement of rising YHWH “against everything” (עַל כָּל), which is proud and exalted (2,12-16), underlines the divine judgement over the world.[37] The proud “mortals” (2:9.17) are not only the leaders of Jerusalem or Assyria, but it can be every human (cf. 2:22).

31 It is noteworthy that *LXX* at this point (ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος τὸ Σιών) is as perfectly ambiguous as the MT.
32 Cf. Clements, *Jerusalem and the Nations*, 91–92; Beuken, *Isaiah II*, 201–203.
33 Cf. Donner, *Israel Unter den Völkern*, 136; Childs, *Isaiah*, 58–59; Dietrich, *Jesaja und die Politik*, 183–185.
34 Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39*, 316. Cf. Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 221.
35 Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 404–405. Cf. Exum, “Of Broken Pots,” 338.
36 Cf. Childs, *Isaiah*, 58; Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 405; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 404.
37 Cf. Sobierajski, *Antropologiczny wymiar proroctw*, 275–284.

3. If YHWH is against everything that is proud and high, does this also include Zion and the holy city of Jerusalem? Chap. 29 dispels these doubts: Isa 29:4 defines Ariel as humbly speaking from the earth and dust (וְשָׁפַלְתְּ מֵאֶרֶץ תְּדַבֵּרִי וּמֵעָפָר תִּשַּׁח אִמְרָתֵךְ, cf. the same verbs שָׁפֵל and שָׁחַח in Isa 2:9.11.17), just after being encamped by God.[38]
4. In the aforementioned context of pride one has to notice a strange definition of Mount Zion: גִּבְעָתָהּ (31:4), which may be a reference to 2:14 (עַל כָּל־הַגְּבָעוֹת). Firstly, there is only one more place in the Old Testament, in which Jerusalem is described as located on גִּבְעָה – in Isa 10:32 (גִּבְעַת יְרוּשָׁלָם), but also in the context of pride (cf. 10:33-34); Zion is never described in this way.[39] Secondly, גִּבְעָה is often connected with the pagan-cult places (2 Kgs 14:23; 16:4; 17:10; Jer 2:20; 13:27; 17:2; Hos 4:13) and – especially in Isaiah – with pride (Isa 2:14 and as a verb in 2:15; 3:16; 5:15.16; 10:33). Therefore, it is rational to see the rising of God against the pride of Jerusalem in this verse, the attitude that is so often denounced by the prophet.[40]
5. Chap. 29 also shows clearly that God can fight against Jerusalem.[41] The triple occurrence of the particle עַל (וְחָנִיתִי כַדּוּר עָלָיִךְ וְצַרְתִּי עָלַיִךְ מֻצָּב וַהֲקִימֹתִי עָלַיִךְ מְצֻרֹת – Isa 29:3) emphasizes the military situation of capturing the city, and also refers to 2:12-16.
6. In the preceding part A (Isa 31:1-3), the technical term וַיָּבֵא רָע (31:2) signifies divine judgement,[42] so one can expect such judgement in the nearest context. Moreover, the parallel expression to וַיָּבֵא רָע is וְקָם עַל־בֵּית מְרֵעִים וְעַל־עֶזְרַת פֹּעֲלֵי אָוֶן – preposition עַל repeated twice (here in the adversative meaning) seems to be undertaken exactly by עַל from part B (v. 4); the divine judgement can also indicate the syntagma יַטֶּה יָדוֹ from the preceding part and all the verbs (כָּשַׁל, נָפַל and כָּלָה), which describe the fall both of Judah and Egypt. Therefore, the reader may expect a more detailed explanation of their demolition.
7. As it was mentioned, the picture of the comparison brings a lion, who takes care about his loot, but finally this prey is to be consumed by him.

It seems that the ambiguity of the use of the preposition עַל was intended by the author.[43] On the one hand, the whole oracle can be read as a threat against Jerusalem because of the abovementioned arguments. Again, one has to notice that in the nearest context the similar expression כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם הַצֹּבְאִים עַל־הַר צִיּוֹן refers to the Assyrian invasion of Judah. Remembering about Assyria's alignment with the tool in

38 Cf. Sobierajski, *Antropologiczny wymiar proroctw*, 239–241.
39 One can think if Ezek 34:26 tells about the capital, but there is no clear indication of this.
40 Cf. Sobierajski, *Antropologiczny wymiar proroctw*, 51–65.
41 In the first part there is, in fact, a treatment both of the Egyptians and those who put their trust in them, as enemies of YHWH. Cf. Eidevall, *Prophecy and Propaganda*, 102.
42 Cf. Rick – Dohmen, "רעע," *TDOT* XIII, 585–586.
43 Cf. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 574.

YHWH's hand, the divine "going into the battle against Mount Zion" can be read as an attack of the hostile empire on Jerusalem. Besides, the symbolism of the lion, which Isaiah very clearly applied to the Assyrian Empire, indicates this understanding of the prophecy. In the past, if the Isaiah's listeners heard about God's judgement that would come with the Assyrian army (5:26-30; 7:18; 8:7; 10:6), compared to the lion (5:29),[44] so in the present oracle (31:4-5) they would expect such a message from Isaiah: the God's punishment through Assyria is coming. But the second part of the comparison is not as they expected. There is no mention about Assyria, but about YHWH, who himself will fight against Zion, but also "on Mount Zion," at His own place. For the leaders of Jerusalem this was the oracle of judgement because they expected God's punishment by the hands of Assyria, for what they were prepared having entered into alliance with Egypt. The message from the prophet is quite different, announcing the intervention of God himself. Their plan was uncovered, their wisdom failed, so they cannot avoid punishment.

2.2. The Metaphor of Birds

The second comparison, which contains the image of birds, allows for many explanations. Its first part has only two words: כְּצִפֳּרִים עָפוֹת – "like birds hovering." Such an image is blurred, hence producing many interpretations, for example:

1. "the birds hover over a young bird which has fallen out of the nest to defend it"[45];
2. "a mother bird which flies back and forth over her nest when a predator is near, both to distract the enemy and, if necessary, to offer herself as a victim to save her little ones"[46];
3. the scavenger birds that are attracted by the lion's killing because usually the lion does not eat its entire prey at once[47];
4. "bird whose nest or whose food is threatened"[48];
5. frightened birds fleeing away from danger[49];
6. large birds casting away their shadows over the city[50].

44 Also, the listeners of Isaiah were probably well known in the images (e.g. of the lion) that hostile emperors applied to themselves. Cf. Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image," 735–736. See also the detailed example of such "Assyrian propaganda" in: Aster, "The Image of Assyria in Isaiah 2:5-22," 249–278.

45 Exum, "Of Broken Pots," 338. Cf. Hempel, *Apoxysmata*, 26–28.

46 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 574. Cf. Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 177; Shemesh, "Isaiah 31,5," 256–260; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 404.

47 Cf. Barré, "Of Lions and Birds," 58; Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 407; Beuken, *Isaiah II*, 202–203.

48 *HALOT* III, 1047; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 427.

49 Cf. Fohrer, *Das Buch Jesaja*, 121. Here the comparison to the birds is used in relation to the inhabitants of Jerusalem with their fearful behavior because of the oncoming Assyrian army. Otto Kaiser (*Isaiah 13–39*, 317) sees an omission here, the text could be: "like fluttering birds the nations will be scattered."

50 Irwin, *Isaiah 28–33*, 114.

The first image is based on the text Deut 32:11: "As an eagle (נֶשֶׁר) stirs up its nest, and hovers (יְרַחֵף) over its young; as it spreads its wings (יִפְרֹשׂ כְּנָפָיו), takes them up (יִקָּחֵהוּ), and bears them aloft on its pinions (יִשָּׂאֵהוּ עַל־אֶבְרָתוֹ), the Lord alone…" But at this point, there are two problems. Firstly, the actions of the eagle are described by quite different verbs than עוּף, especially by נָשָׂא that clearly indicates "bearing," in contrast to Isa 31:5. Secondly, the noun צִפּוֹר refers generally to the birds (Gen 7:14; Lev 14:4; Ezek 39:4), or to the small birds like sparrows (Deut 22:6; Eccl 12:4),[51] whereas, in Deut 32 is an eagle, and as far as one can find images of eagle carrying young on its wings (cf. also Exod 19:4), this is not possible in the case of צִפֳּרִים. The similar argument can be raised against cases (3), (4) and (6). The Old Testament uses another term for birds of prey: עַיִט (cf. Gen 15:11, also עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם in 2 Sam 21:10 or עֵיט צִפּוֹר in Ezek 39:4), and it has to be expected that Isaiah, well versed in the natural world,[52] would use it (cf. עַיִט in Isa 18:6 that is considered to be Isaianic).[53] The case (2) is also hard acceptable, which I will show below analyzing the verb פָּסַח. The understanding of צִפֳּרִים that I want to follow is (5), although applied not to the Jerusalemites, but to the besiegers. In such a sense, the verb עָפוֹת would not mean simply "to hover" but "to fly away," a meaning which is confirmed in Ps 90:10 and Job 20:8 (also in *Qal*). The sense would be: just like sparrows, that could be very numerous, are flying away at once – frightened by something – and none of them remains, the same will be with the enemies of Jerusalem, e.g. with the grand and multitudinous Assyrian army (cf. Isa 37:36). Against this interpretation one can argue that "it is in fact YHWH himself who is being compared to the hovering birds."[54] However, one can point to the fragments in Proto-Isaiah in which the essence of the metaphor lies in the overall condition of the compared entities. For instance, in Isa 10:15, the proud of the ax and of the saw is compared to the absurd situation of raising by the rod the one who lifts it up or lifting by the staff the one who is not wood (it does not matter whether we associate the axe/saw with the rod/staff). There is also a similar rhetorical device in Isa 29:8: the subject of the comparison (the vehicle of the metaphor) in this case is not the one who dreams, but the dream (cf. 29:7) with all its illusiveness (being hungry, dreaming about food and then waking up still hungry). Analogically, such a vehicle in Isa 31:5 are not the birds themselves, but their departure, and the tenor of the metaphor is saving Jerusalem.

In Isa 31:5 some kind of irony may be recognized. The birds are the symbol of weakness (Ps 11:1), unaware of danger they are trapped by their enemies (Prov 7:23; Lam 3:52).[55] Sennacherib in his annals brags about Hezekiah: "Himself I made a pris-

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51 Cf. Otto, "פָּסַח," *TDOT* XII, 445–446.

52 Isa 10:14; 17:5-6; 28:23-29. Cf. Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 676–677.

53 Cf. Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 211.

54 Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 224.

55 Such symbolism might come from the common practice of fowling at that time. Cf. Borowski, *Every Living Thing*, 155–158.

oner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage."[56] If in the past the Assyrian king boasted that he had conquered the nations just like grasping a nest, like gathering eggs that have been forsaken (Isa 10:14), so now he and his army are equal to the departing birds. But there is one more interesting observation. Among the boasts of the tyrant one can also find: וְלֹא הָיָה נֹדֵד כָּנָף וּפֹצֶה פֶה וּמְצַפְצֵף ("and there was none that moved a wing, or opened its mouth, or chirped" – 10:14). The last verb in *Pilpel* has a similar, onomatopoeic root to צִפּוֹר, and also occurred in Isa 29:4, though there in reference to Jerusalem (מֵעָפָר אִמְרָתֵךְ תְּצַפְצֵף – "your speech shall whisper out of the dust"). It seems that in this case Isaiah used intentional ambiguity as well: the birds could be the numerous Assyrian army that suddenly disappeared (Isa 37:36), but can also refer to the enemies of the will of YHWH inside the capital, among the Israelites. In fact, because of the similarly to the first comparison, the listeners of the prophet's oracle could at first impression (after hearing only the first part כְּצִפֳּרִים עָפוֹת) think of it as the divine judgement. God's punishment is coming, the Assyria like a lion is approaching, so all the nations – among them the Jerusalemites – will fly away like defenseless swallows. In their own opinion, they are prepared for such a situation – they have already made a covenant with Egypt. But also in this case, the second part of the comparison is unexpected for them. Isaiah announces the salvation of Jerusalem, though they have no idea how it will happen.

The above observations are confirmed by the analysis of the following four verbs making up the second part of the comparison. The verb גָּנַן occurs only in Proto-Isaiah and in Deutero-Zechariah, always in the sense of "defending" (Isa 37:35; 38:6[57]; Zech 9:15; 12:8). The basic meaning – "to cover, surround, defend, protect" – can also be seen in confronting it with the noun מָגֵן ("shield" as a weapon), derived from the same root גנן (cf. e.g. 2 Chr 23:9).[58] Immediately, however, the question arises: How could small birds be anybody's protection (in a shield manner)? As it has been said, a few proposition were made to resolve this problem. The birds could hover over a young bird or the nest or the food to defend it. But would it be possible that Isaiah chooses such small and weak animals as an example of the shield? Even if one assumes the meaning of "the scavenger birds" (which is doubtful), it would be difficult to demonstrate how this "hovering" over the prey could have a "protecting" character (e.g. if even human – Abram or Rizpah – could scare them in Gen 15:11 and in 2 Sam 21:10)? I claim that the nature of this protection lies in the understanding of the following verbs: הִצִּיל פָּסֹחַ וְהִמְלִיט.

The basic meaning of the verb הִצִּיל (*Hi* is the most common form of the root נצל in the Old Testament) is "to take away" with the nuance of separation. As examples

56 *ANET*, 288 (fragment from Taylor Prism).

57 The same passages are in 2 Kgs 19:34; 20:6. Regarding the mutual relations of both narrative sections 2 Kgs 18–20 and Isa 36–39 see e.g.: Beuken, *Isaiah II*, 335–341; Anderson, "The Rise, Fall, and Renovation," 147–167.

58 Cf. Freedman – O'Connor – Ringgren, "מָגֵן," *TDOT* VIII, 74–75.

one can point to Gen 31:9.16 (God taking away the livestock), Hos 2:11 (with the parallel verb לָקַח) or Ps 119:43 ("Do not take the word of truth from my mouth!"). This understanding leads to the derivative meaning, i.e. "to save, to deliver" (e.g. Exod 3:8; Ps 142:7; Prov 10:2; Isa 19:20). However, even those fragments in which the root נצל takes the meaning of "rescuing, saving, protecting," there exists the perceptible idea of "taking away."[59] In the context of Proto-Isaiah, there are at least three important occurrences. Firstly, the group of verbs appears in the so-called historical addition (Isa 36–39), always in the meaning of rescuing the capital from the hand of the Assyrian king (cf. 36:14-20; 37:11-12; 38:6). Secondly, in the announcement of the danger from the people that will come from the ends of the world (5:26-30), Assyria is compared to the roaring lion (כְּפִיר, cf. 31:4) that grasps its prey (טֶרֶף, cf. 31:4), carries it off and "none can rescue" (אֵין מַצִּיל – lit. "there is no one who can take it away"). This action of course implies taking off the prey to eat it, i.e. to destroy it. Thirdly, in chap. 20, God calls Isaiah to walk naked and barefoot as a sign of leading away the Egyptian captives by the king of Assyria. At the end of the chapter, the inhabitants are complaining: "This is what has happened to those in whom we hoped and to whom we fled for help (לְעֶזְרָה, cf. 31:1) and deliverance (לְהִנָּצֵל in *Ni*) from the king of Assyria! And we, how shall we escape (נִמָּלֵט in *Ni*, cf. 31:5)?" The *Ni* stem underlines the reciprocal aspect of the verbs here, that people want to act in their own favor to deliver and escape. Otherwise, in 31:5, both verbs are in *Hi* stem. It raises the question: can it show the causative aspect that only God can do the deliverance, in contrast to chap. 20? It is possible, however, one has to note that נצל does not occur in *Qal*, so it would be questionable to talk about the causative aspect without knowing anything about the meaning and even the existence of נצל in the base stem. The second verb הִמְלִיט, usually occurring in *Ni* ("to escape"), supports this theory; it has the *Hi* form only in two verses: Isa 31:5 and 66:7. In the latter, it means "to give birth to," so it can be understood as "to cause to escape" (from the mother's womb).

Very unusual and unexpected is the appearance of the verb פָּסַח only here, in Isaiah (there are also two occurrences of the adjective פִּסֵּחַ – "lame" in 33:23; 35:6). Its basic meaning is "to be lame, to limp" (the use one can see in Elijah's rebuke: "How long will you go limping with two different opinions?" in 1 Kgs 18:21) and the second one "to pass or spring over" (cf. Exod 12:13.23.27).[60] Precisely because of these two options, there are also two tendencies to interpret the inf. abs. פָּסֹחַ in the context of Isa 31. The first one is based on the meaning "to be lame," understanding this action as hobbling, as the birds do when their nest is threatened. The parent bird limps away from the nest, pretending that one of its wings is broken and thus luring

59 Cf. Hossfeld – Kalthoff, "נצל," *TDOT* IX, 536.

60 Cf. Shemesh, "Isaiah 31,5," 258. However, there are many doubts if these two meanings derivate from two roots or a single root, as well as opinions about a mutual relation between them. For such attempts and also a very rich bibliography see: Otto, "פָּסַח," 1–24.

away the predator that sees an easy prey.[61] The text Isa 37:7, in which God says about the Assyrian king: "I myself will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor, and return to his own land; I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land" is raised as an argument. So, in some sense, YHWH lured away Sennacherib from the capital and led him into his own country. In this attractive understanding we can, however, discern the following difficulties: (1) the verb פָּסַח means "to be lame" and not "to pretend being lame"; (2) there is a comparison to the birds, not one bird that usually uses such a distraction. Therefore, what fits much better fits is the second meaning "to pass over, to spare" also referring to the etiology of the Passover festival. Although in his preaching, Isaiah refers to the events of Exodus[62] a few times, he makes no reference to the Paschal Night. However, this does not prove that the traditions of this festival were alien to him. This cannot be said with absolute certainty, but one can find an analogy between the passage of YHWH in Egypt (and the sparing of Israeli houses at the same time with slaying off the Egyptian firstborns – Exod 12:29) and the sparing of Jerusalem while the angel was passing through the Assyrian camp (Isa 37:36). "One cannot assume with absolute certainty that Isaiah is trying to remind the listeners of the Passover night,"[63] but for sure the specific character of the last two verbs (פָּסֹחַ וְהִמְלִיט) can be seen in Isa 31:5. "Shielding" Jerusalem and "delivering" it refer to YHWH's passing over Jerusalem to spare it (פָּסֹחַ) and causing all its enemies to "escape," i.e. to disappear (הִמְלִיט). What is important is that these enemies do not only include the besiegers, but also – this cannot be ruled out – some of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, which is testified in Isa 29:20 and 30:17 (with the verbs כָּלָה – "to finish," נוּס – "to flee," the same as in Isa 31:3.8).

Conclusion

The literary analysis carried out according to the rules of the Semitic rhetoric method has shown up the textual structure of Isa 31:1-9. The text has been divided into two main images: the fate of Israel, deviating from YHWH (vv. 1–5), and the fate of Israel, returning to YHWH (vv. 6–9). Although, each scene describes different situations, they are complementary and harmonizing. Furthermore, the structure reveals the internal dynamism of each scene: both have the element of the presentation of the actual condition (deviation from God or potential return to him), which is fol-

61 Cf. Keel, "Erwägungen," 430; Shemesh, "Isaiah 31,5," 259–260.

62 E.g. raising the staff over the sea (Isa 10:26; cf. Exod 14:26); raising the staff against the people (Isa 10:24; cf. Exod 2:11-12); the motif of "the wrath of the Lord" and "stretched hand" (Isa 5:25). Some of these verses are, however, treated as an editorial supplement. The theological motifs of Exodus are definitely more frequently pronounced in Hosea or Deutero-Isaiah. Cf. Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 578.

63 Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 224.

lowed by the adequate result: God's rise against Israel (vv. 4–5) or against Assyria (vv. 7–9). Therefore, the understanding of the message conveyed by the animal metaphors has been read at two levels. The first one binds them with part A (vv. 1–3) from the causal point of view: the comparisons are expected to be the punishment for Israel. The second combines their significance with the look at the parallel part B' (vv. 7–9). The salvation presented there is not specified, nevertheless Assyria will fall by the sword, though the sword not of man (v. 8). Therefore, both the punishment for Jerusalem (B) and her salvation (B') will not occur according to the human thoughts.

The problem posed at the very beginning regarding the meaning of the phrase from v. 4: יֵרֵד יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת לִצְבֹּא עַל־הַר־צִיּוֹן has found its solution. One has not to choose between the two translations: "YHWH shall go down to fight upon Mount Zion" or "against Mount Zion." Both meanings are acceptable; moreover, both of them were intended by Isaiah and are essential parts of his message. Yet, the ambiguity of the use of the preposition עַל was intended. The listeners, hearing about the lion, would expect such a message from Isaiah: God's punishment through Assyria is coming… But the message from the prophet is quite different, announcing the intervention of God himself, not through Assyria. God himself is the lion and he is against both Assyria (and her king), and Jerusalem (her rulers and defenders). One can see a similar scheme in the second comparison in v. 5. The listeners, hearing about the birds, would understand the image this way: God's punishment by the hands of Assyria is coming and all the nations will fly away like sparrows… But the message is quite different, announcing the salvation of Jerusalem in yet an unknown way. The besiegers are the ones who will fly away, but the historical salvation of the capital in 701 BC would mean at the same time the devastation of the defenders' plans. Hence, defenders' thoughts and intentions are also as fragile and fleeting as birds departing in an instant. The city is saved, so the alliance with Egypt turned out to be completely unnecessary.

The structure of the pericope and its exegesis reveal the main goal that guided the prophet transmitting God's message. It is most visible in v. 6, which was a direct appeal and had to convince the hearers, including the current readers of the Book of Isaiah, to rely only on YHWH.[64] The key of the prophet's message is based on his individual and intimate encounter with YHWH. For him God is always "an almighty, absolutely demanding being, who could consume him and yet could set him free at the same time."[65] This experience hasted the prophet to announce the divine message to his addressees with full energy and engagement, as well as with every possible mean, including shock and surprise shown by the incoherence of Isaiah's oracle, to convince his listeners.

64 Cf. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39*, 407.
65 Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 616.

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